

Feminist and quantitative? Measuring the extent of domestic violence in Georgetown, Guyana

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Abstract

The vast majority of Anglo-American feminist research in Geography eschews quantitative methods despite the understanding that all data are forms of representation. As a consequence feminist geographers have refrained from pursuing certain research questions and epistemological paths of investigation. In this article I explore the arguments feminists have raised against using quantitative methods and the consequences of this impasse while raising the possibilities of adopting a critical approach to quantitative methods of analysis that incorporates feminist practices. I then turn to a case study to discuss the methods employed and the results obtained from a (multi-level cluster) survey of 360 women conducted with the Guyanese women's organisation, Red Thread, on the extent and nature of domestic violence, a topic that does not lend itself easily to quantification. I conclude by assessing the importance of opening up feminist enquiry in Geography to the possibilities unleashed by the uncoupling of quantitative methods from masculinist versions of positivism and of the particular importance of quantitative methods in the transference of skills in north-south alliances.

Keywords: geographical feminist research, quantitative methods, Guyana.

Resum

Feminista i quantitativa? Mesurant l'extensió de la violència domèstica a Georgetown, Guyana

L'àmplia majoria de la recerca feminista angloamericana en Geografia evita els mètodes quantitatius malgrat saber que tota data és una forma de representació. Com conseqüència d'això, geògrafes i geògrafs feministes s'han estat d'aprofundir en determinades preguntes de recerca i en camins d'investigació epistemològica. En aquest article exploraré els arguments feministes que s'han utilitzat contra l'ús de mètodes quantitatius i les conseqüències d'aquest camí sense sortida per no tenir presents les possibilitats d'adoptar una aproximació crítica a l'anàlisi dels mètodes quantitatius que incorporen les pràctiques feministes. Així mostro un estudi i presento els mètodes utilitzats i els resultats obtinguts a partir d'una enquesta (clúster multivariant) a 360 dones realitzada per una organització de dones de la Guyana, *Red Thread*, sobre l'extensió i la natura de la violència domèstica, un tema que en sí mateix no és fàcil de quantificar. Conclo de la importància d'obrir la recerca feminista en Geografia cap a les possibilitats que permeten els mètodes quantitatius lluny de les versions masculinistes positivistes i de la importància dels mètodes quantitatius per a la transferència de tècniques en les aliances nord-sud.

Paraules clau: recerca geogràfica feminista, mètodes quantitatius, Guyana.

Resumen

Feminista y cuantitativa? Midiendo la extensión de la violencia doméstica en Georgetown, Guyana

Una gran parte de la investigación feminista angloamericana en Geografía evita los métodos cuantitativos a pesar de saber que cualquier dato es una forma de representación. A consecuencia de esta situación, geógrafas y geógrafos feministas han evitado profundizar en determinadas preguntas de investigación y en caminos de investigación epistemológica. En este artículo exploraré los argumentos feministas que se han utilizado contra el uso de métodos cuantitativos y las consecuencias de este camino sin salida por no tener presentes las posibilidades de adoptar una aproximación crítica al análisis de los métodos cuantitativos que incorporen las prácticas feministas. Aquí muestro un estudio de caso y presento los métodos utilizados y los resultados obtenidos a partir de una encuesta (clúster multivariante) a 360 mujeres realizada por una organización de mujeres de la Guyana, *Red Thread*, sobre la extensión y la naturaleza de la violencia doméstica, un tema que en sí mismo no es fácil de cuantificar. Concluyo mostrando la importancia de abrir la investigación fe-

ministra en Geografía a las posibilidades que permiten los métodos cuantitativos lejanos de las versiones masculinizadas positivistas y de la importancia de los métodos cuantitativos para la transferencia de técnicas en las alianzas norte-sur.

Palabras clave: investigación geográfica feminista, métodos cuantitativos, Guyana.

Introduction

The title of this article alludes to an almost impossible association in Anglo-American Geography; feminist researchers cannot be assumed to conduct quantitative research. Should this even be a matter for concern? Many geographers trained in the Quantitative Revolution period of Geography now avoid a quantitative approach, regardless of their theoretical stance. Methodological approaches, as much as theoretical ones, enjoy their hour in the spotlight, going in and out of fashion with the rise and fall of analytical trends. But in Anglo-American Geography quantitative techniques have never come back in fashion, their association with positivism tainting them beyond redemption. In this paper I attempt to show how these techniques can be decoupled from such a damaging association so that being feminist and quantitative is not only possible but desirable too.

My musings on this issue began during my six year stint as the Managing Editor of *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. During this period I oversaw the publication of over 150 articles (as well as reading many more that did not make it through the review stage). Apart from six of these that constituted a set of theme papers on GIS and feminist geography they were all, bar one, based on qualitative research. In addition over the last sixteen years I have supervised over 30 MA and PhD students in both Geography and Women's Studies, not one of whom has used quantitative methods in their analyses. I raise these figures because I am genuinely concerned that Anglo-American feminist geographers are producing a new generation of students for whom the question "can feminist research be quantitative?" is irrelevant, simply because they do not have the ability to conduct quantitative research. Many of the papers in *Gender, Place and Culture* are written by senior scholars who were students during the days when Geography was going through its Quantitative Revolution. So while they have the ability to conduct quantitative research but have chosen not to, the younger authors in the journal most probably did not have this choice; they have either not been given the opportunity to learn how to do quantitative research or they have shied away from it. There are serious political and academic consequences to such moves that I explore here.

The first point I address is how feminist researchers came to disavow the use of quantitative techniques. There is a somewhat lengthy and I would argue fallacious debate in Women's Studies about the nature of feminist research and whether feminist quantitative research is indeed an oxymoron. Feminist geographers have added little to this debate but some significant points have been raised that deserve further discussion. In particular I hope to show that it is possible to uncouple quantitative techniques from masculinist versions of positivism, a coupling that "is historically produced and is not necessary or inevitable" (Lawson 1995, p. 451). To illustrate how a critical approach that incorporates feminist practices when using quantitative methods of analysis is possible I then turn to an examination of a research project I conducted with the Guyanese women's organisation Red Thread on a topic that does not lend itself easily to quantification, namely the nature and extent of domestic violence in Georgetown, Guyana. I conclude by discussing some of the consequences for feminist knowledge production of feminist geographers engaging with quantitative analyses.

Can Quantitative Methods be Feminist?

In a set of papers addressing quantitative feminist research in Geography published in *The Professional Geographer* in 1995 Sarah McLafferty claims that the central critiques against the use of quantitative methods by feminists are, "Quantitative methods claims of objectivity and their assumed legitimacy; problems of measurement and definition; and the fact that the methods break the living connections between researchers and the subjects of that research." (McLafferty 1995, p. 436). I now turn to address each of these three concerns.

Claims of objectivity and legitimacy

The arguments against the use of quantitative techniques are well rehearsed in feminist literature, the most common objection to them being cast at an epistemological level; namely the association of quantitative research with positivism, its claim that science is value neutral and the resultant objectivity of statistical techniques (Harding 1986). It was positivists concern with being able to observe and the counting of observations as the basis on which experiments could be conducted that led to a reliance on quantitative techniques. Hence, claims of the objectivity and legitimacy of quantitative methods arise from them being the techniques used to implement the 'scientific method' associated with positivism, the philosophy of knowledge that undergirded the rise of the sciences in Europe in the nineteenth century. Table 1 outlines the main differences between feminists and

Table 1
Defining Legitimate Knowledge for Positivist and Feminist
Philosophies of Knowledge

Positivism	Feminism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scientific knowledge derives from the Enlightenment and is based on factual evidence of what can be observed i.e., it is based on knowledge of objects. It is what Maria Mies refers to as 'contemplative, uninvolved spectator knowledge' or what Donna Haraway refers to as the 'god-trick', or the 'view from nowhere'. - Knowledge production is a rational undertaking by qualified scientists that aims to specify connections between ideas (scientific theories), experience (what our senses – especially observation – and experiments tell us) and reality (what actually exists). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge is always partial and situated based on experiential, emotional, and subjective values, and developed through praxis. - Knowledge production includes analyses of how the researchers' identity, experience and theoretical framework shape the research agenda, data analysis and findings. - Knowledge is anti-foundational i.e., there is no external truth waiting to be discovered. The only possible bases for truth claims lie within communally created history, tradition and culture through dialogic, co-operative debate i.e., producing knowledge is less an issue of observing objects than of negotiation within an epistemic community. - Knowing other people is central to the production of human subjectivity.

positivists in terms of what knowledge is considered legitimate and how it is produced.

What Table 1 reveals is that rather than a "quantitative versus qualitative" divide, it is the beliefs about what comprises knowledge and how it is constituted that divides positivists and feminists. It is, moreover, increasingly being recognized within the discipline of Women's Studies that feminist debates about the unsuitability of quantitative methods for feminist purposes are less about these techniques of inquiry being incompatible with feminist research and more with attempts by academic feminists to 'professionalise' their discipline by claiming its own distinctive epistemological approach to knowledge production, one that was least likely to mimic the objectivist, value-neutral epistemological positions adopted in mainstream scientific approaches. As the feminist sociologist Annie Oakley states:

"Feminism needed a research method, a distinct methodology, in order to occupy a distinctive place in the academy and acquire social status and moral legitimacy. Opposition to 'traditional' research methods as much as innovation of alternative ones provided an organizing platform for feminist scholarship... and the whole contention of positivism and realism as inherently anti-feminist" (Oakley 1998 p. 716).

In other words, the association of quantitative techniques with masculinist views of science has been socially and historically constituted and is itself an ideological position.

A related point is that many academic feminists concerns with explicating a feminist approach to knowledge production have focused solely on questions of epistemology and it is these that have come to define the parameters of debates about the theoretical grounding of research, largely replacing the feminist link between praxis and knowledge production.

Problems of measurement and definition

Emphasising the unsuitability of a positivist approach to knowledge production has led to a voluminous literature on feminist methodology. Although exploring a range of issues this body of work is largely constitutive of that which has narrowed down its focus to viewing positivism as synonymous with quantification. Hence the simplistic view that it is the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches that is of importance and that only qualitative methods can be considered suitable for feminist research: quantitative research is “objective, irrelevant and superficial” while qualitative research is “subjective, relevant and descriptive” (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991, p. 94). There are numerous problems with such a characterisation not least of which is that it erases the similarities between them: “For example, quantitative methods rely on considerable subjective interpretation, and qualitative methods necessarily entail considerable objectification” (Lawson, 1995, p. 451). Both methods produce sets of data that require the subjective constituting of boundaries and as such both have problems, albeit different types, of measurement and definition. Although all data, regardless of whether they are quantitative or qualitative, are representations, the quantitative approach of employing numbers to represent women has been deemed unacceptable and the qualitative approach of using women’s words acceptable (although the final choice of which words are used is at the discretion of the researcher and not that of the speaker). This understanding of quantitative research, however, jars with the understanding that all data are representations and need to be understood as such.

Breaking the connections between researchers and subjects?

Quantitative research has also been accused of ‘breaking the connections between researchers and subjects’ thus denying the reality that quantitative methods, or counting, can be compatible with research that examines contextualized relations. Quantitative research can be conducted in domains other than that of a positivist top-down setting of research priorities, with a separa-

tion of expert knowers from those at the bottom of hierarchies of power. What is at stake is not the use of quantification but the ways in which research participants are treated and the care with which researchers attempt to represent their lived experiences, and how they use this knowledge to change lives (Stanley and Wise, 1983). It follows that feminist research should be based not on an *a priori* understanding that only qualitative methods can be deemed suitable, but rather that a feminist methodology meets the following criteria:

1. that it can yield knowledge that is reliable, effective, and oppressive neither to women nor to other socially marginalized or other disempowered people;
2. that it honours feminists' commitments to taking women's experiences seriously;
3. that it addresses differences between women while retaining a capacity to draw general, even law-like conclusions, but conclusions that derive from specific historical and geographical contexts and not a generalized notion of women.

It is with these criteria in mind that I now turn to a case study of a feminist research project that makes extensive use of quantitative methods while situating itself within a context that takes these criteria as their starting point.

Domestic Violence in Guyana

Violence against women is now seen as a global issue (Bunch 1990) and violence has been focused upon both as a violation to women's human rights and as an obstacle to women's participation in development (Proffitt 1994). As in other Caribbean and Latin American countries, and in other world regions in the early 1990s, domestic violence emerged as probably the most important item on the agenda of many women's organisations (Moser with Peake 1996). The decade witnessed the emergence of domestic violence laws, crisis centres, and an increased reporting of cases of violence. But these actions are still just the tip of the iceberg in combating the high level of domestic violence in the region where there is a great deal of popular support for 'wife beating' and the corporal punishment of children at home and at school.

The Guyanese women's organisation, Red Thread, was, and still is, heavily involved in a range of activities concerning violence against women. In the early 1990s it produced a popular radio series on domestic violence from which it developed the script for a play called 'Everybody's Business'. It secured funding to perform the play in various communities along the coast and then produced a sequel for another radio series. One result was a flood of enquiries from parents and individual women whom it has helped to file petitions in court over sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence. Coun-

selling and intervention with criminal justice, health and social agencies, such as accompanying women to court, is now a regular activity for Red Thread women. In the late 1990s it was responsible for designing and producing for popular dissemination a popular guide to the Domestic Violence Act. It has also participated in numerous public demonstrations against violence against women and has secured funding to produce a number of videos addressing the topic of violence against women and children and these have been shown on local television channels. Red Thread members have also been active supporters of Help and Shelter, a counselling service for battered women, transforming an issue primarily defined as private into one having a public and political status. Indeed, public education about situating domestic violence in relations of power, of dominance and subordination, has been an important element of Red Thread's work. Given its extensive knowledge about domestic violence in the country and having engaged in political activity based on that knowledge it was a logical extension for the organisation to turn its attention to research. Red Thread was interested in this research project for a number of reasons:

1. Despite its extensive knowledge and experience of violence against women no current data existed that could illustrate the *extent* of domestic violence;
2. Given that breaking down the deeply and long held classed and racialised divides in the country between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese women is a primary aim of the organisation it wanted data that could show the *nature* of the similarities in their lives rather than emphasising differences;
3. It needed data that would enable it to apply for funding on future projects around violence reduction.

The Research Project Methods

Having established a Research Team in Red Thread in the early 1990s that had conducted research on a range of topics the organisation was well equipped to conduct a large scale research project on the extent and nature of domestic violence.¹

Training the Research Team

Two months were spent training the eight members of the Research Team in research techniques including basic skills in literacy and computing. Most

1. For the results of other research projects conducted by Red thread see Peake (1998), Peake and Trotz (1999, 2001), Trotz and Peake (1999, 2000, 2001). For information on Red Thread see Andaiye (2004), de Souza and Peake (2009) and Peake (1993, 1996).

time was devoted to an introduction to concepts and skills in research methodologies including participant observation, experiments, archival research, and survey research. Survey research training included learning about survey design, random and non-random sampling, questionnaire construction, in-depth interviews and interview techniques. Training was also given in transcribing interviews, coding of questionnaires, transferring data from questionnaires to coding sheets and transferring data from coding sheets into the SPSSx software programme.

Designing the Survey

In order to conduct research that would investigate the *extent* of the violence experienced by Guyanese women we needed to conduct a survey (as opposed, for example, to focus group or interviews with specifically chosen women). This purpose required a representative sample, i.e., one that would reflect variations existing in the population from which it was taken. This is probably best achieved by taking a random sample because a basic principle of random sampling is that a sample will be representative of the population from which it is taken if all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected. Thus, a random sample (also referred to as a probability sample) refers to the way in which each unit in the sample population is chosen, i.e., each unit has an equal choice of selection and can only be chosen once. In other words, the definition of randomness refers to the mode of selection of sample units and not to the resultant sample.

The study population, i.e., the aggregate of elements from which the sample is selected was the adult population of the country. However, lack of time and financial resources prevented us from conducting a simple random sample that would have involved interviewing women in every region of the country. It was necessary therefore to restrict the sample to Greater Georgetown where 41 per cent of all residents live (Government of Guyana, 1998). The elements (i.e., those units about which information is collected and which provides the basis of the analysis) in this case were adult women over the age of 18 years in Georgetown. A list of all adult women over the age of 18, known as the sampling frame (i.e., the list of sampling units from which the sample is selected) was available, namely the 1997 Electoral Register. The Electoral Register lists the names and addresses of men and women of the age of eighteen and over. While we could have drawn new lists to contain only women this would have been an extremely time consuming task. Hence, our use of the register was based on the underlying assumption that it contained equal numbers of women and men. The high percentage of women who were not available for interview (approximately 40 per cent) because they had moved from the address listed for them does give rise to some concern about the degree of bias this could have introduced into the survey. It is also indicative of the acute housing

problem in Georgetown and could not have been avoided. Bias was minimised however by selecting the sample randomly and by achieving an extremely high response rate of the women interviewed of over 90 per cent. We are convinced that it was the expertise of Red Thread members, in being able to allay women's fears about answering questions, that resulted in such a high response rate.

In order to compensate for the large geographical area to be covered and make the most efficient use of resources a simple random sample was not chosen. We needed to adopt a sampling design that would concentrate the fieldwork and save time, labour and money. Hence we adopted multi-stage cluster sampling with stratification. This meant that rather than taking a random sample of all women in all areas of Georgetown that only certain areas (or clusters) were selected (randomly). The first stage clusters (or Primary Sampling Units, PSUs) were the 62 electoral sub-divisions of Greater Georgetown. These PSUs were stratified by social class into middle-class and working-class strata. The designation of an area as working-class or middle-class was determined through discussions with the Research Team and other Red Thread members. While there was much agreement on the designation of the majority of the areas we acknowledge that this is a subjective exercise and acts only as a rough proxy for the variable of social class.

One immediate problem we faced with our choice of PSUs was their differing population size. Whenever the clusters to be sampled are of greatly differing sizes the standard procedure is to use a modified sampling design called probability proportionate to size (PPS). Therefore, because of the unequal population sizes in each electoral sub-division, each PSU was selected with probability proportional to size (PPS). For example, if one PSU has twice the population of another one then it was given twice the chance of being selected. The same number of women could then be selected from each of the chosen PSUs with the overall probability of selection of any woman being the same (remembering that a random sample is defined as one in which each element has the same chance of selection). A sample of the Secondary Sample Units i.e., individual adult women, within each PSU, was then taken (without stratification).

The Interviews

In drawing up the questionnaires team members drew on their own experiences to discuss the themes we wanted to address. The wording of questions was also altered to fit in with the Guyanese vernacular. Time was spent ensuring that the women could interview in a way that would inspire trust. This involved them being very familiar with the questionnaire so that awkward silences did not disrupt the flow of conversation. No member of the Team was allowed to go beyond this stage to conduct survey interviews until she had the ability to do so. Although this involved considerable time it was only

through such intensive 'quality control' measures that an acceptable level of proficiency could be assured. When sufficient practice interviews had been conducted to ensure that all Team members had acquired a high level of expertise they were further tested through the use of small pilot surveys of ten women each.

At the time of the survey the political crisis in the country meant there were often street demonstrations and riots and the fear, for many, of being attacked was palpable. As a result there were several days when the women in the Research Team did not feel safe to go into certain areas of the city to work. In addition, our decision that the women would work in pairs instead of singly in order to provide a safer context in which to work, obviously increased the length of time it took to complete the survey and three months were spent in the field in Georgetown. Each respondent was interviewed by two Red Thread interviewers in interviews lasting on average for 90 minutes and ranging from fifteen minutes to just over two hours. Each woman on the list was contacted on at least four separate occasions, at different times of day, before a participant on the substitute list replaced her. As mentioned, we believe the high response rate of over 90 per cent owed much to the professional training of the Team members and the close attention paid to quality control. At the end of each day's work, when the Research Team had finished their interviews, each questionnaire was checked over. This was a very time consuming exercise but was considered vital to maintaining quality control and ensuring that any observations the interviewers had about the area they were working in or their comments on participants could be recorded immediately. It was also at these daily debriefing sessions that decisions were made as to whether a participant would be a good candidate for the focus group discussions that also formed an integral part of this research project.

Analysis of Data on Domestic Violence

The major findings are listed in Table 2. These reveal that regardless of class or race, domestic violence is a prevalent feature in many women's lives. Nearly 80 per cent said domestic violence is very common in Guyana. Over one in four women currently in a relationship were experiencing violence and one in three women knew of someone else experiencing violence. And as surveys in many countries have shown, of those experiencing violence only 40 per cent had sought help of some sort and of these only one in five had gone to the police. Unsurprisingly over 65 per cent of all women interviewed had no knowledge of the Domestic Violence Act. Yet while it was women who were experiencing violence perpetuated by men it was women who were responsible for administering violence towards their children. Over 70 per cent of all women with children admitted hitting their children and over 80 per cent have experienced physical abuse such as slaps and beating as a child.

Table 2
Main Findings on Domestic Violence Survey

Aspects of Violence	Findings
Perception of Violence	Nearly four out of every five respondents perceived violence in the family to be very common in Guyana (76.8%).
Definition of Domestic Violence	With regards to the kinds of behaviours that the respondents defined as domestic violence everyday physically violent behaviour such as fighting, beating, or hitting, was recognised by 83% of respondents. Moreover, 50% of the respondents also defined domestic violence as verbally abusive behaviour such as curses, threats, and humiliation.
Experience of Violence as a Child	Over 84% said that they had experienced physical abuse such as licks, slaps, beating. In approximately eight out of ten cases of childhood abuse it was the respondent's mother or other female relative who had administered this abuse. However, for sexual abuse it was invariably male relatives who were responsible.
Knowledge of Violence	Over one in three of the respondents knew someone currently experiencing domestic violence (35.5%).
Experience of Domestic Violence in Current Relationship	There were 237 respondents (65.8%) currently involved in a relationship or union of some kind. Of these 27.7% (or one in four) had experienced physical abuse; 26.3% (or one in four) had undergone verbal abuse; and 12.7% (one in eight) had suffered sexual violence.
Violence in the Community	The majority of respondents felt safe as a woman in their own neighbourhoods (81.3%).
Women's Responses to Violence	Most of the women who had experienced domestic violence with their current partner said that they had not done reported their case to the police (78.9%), indicating that only one in five cases of domestic violence are reported.
Women's Knowledge and Use of Services	The majority of women, or more than 65 per cent, had no knowledge of the Domestic Act (67.5%). Of the women who did have some knowledge of the Act, only a few (15.3%, or one in eight) knew what the Act provided for.
Attitudes and Behavioural Practices Relating to Violence Against Children	The majority of all women in the survey felt that children should be punished in some form (70.0%). When the women who agreed that children should be punished were asked about how children should be punished, the most common response was hitting, slapping, and/or lashing. Out of all the respondents hitting was seen as the most agreed upon form of punishment by nearly a third (30.8%). A slightly smaller percentage believed privileges should be withdrawn (26.2%) or that children should be grounded (18.1%). Approximately three in four (72.2%) women with children said they disciplined them by means of physical violence.

In 80 per cent of these cases it was the women's mother or other female relative who administered this abuse. Our analysis of the data thus led us to address women's entanglement in violence and define domestic violence as

any act, including the threat of acts, committed by a person with whom the victim has or had a conjugal, love or sexual relationship, or a relationship of dependence, which impairs the life, body, psychological well-being or liberty of a woman and/or children.

While the vast majority of abuse between women and men is perpetuated by men we argue that the power relations involved in violence are complex, multiple and contradictory, rather than fixed and predictable. Just like men, women do not live outside patriarchal ideology and practice, and some perpetuate violence against people they are likely to have control over such as children and elderly people. Hence, we argue domestic abuse has a common basis in the playing out of relations of authority and control over other people's bodies.

Conclusion

Karen de Souza, co-ordinator, Red Thread: *'Many decisions about our lives are taken from figures and we don't know where these figures come from and we should be able to control this.'*

I started this paper by referencing the divide between those who do quantitative research and those who choose not to, pointing out the potentially larger divide between those who do not and those who *cannot*. But is this divide only a feature of the Anglo-American academy? It is not often replicated in the South where geographic research in the academy and by non-governmental organisations is often quantitative and where funding and policy decisions are usually made on the basis of quantified data. The avenues open to obtain funding to do research in the South are dominated by international institutional agencies such as the United Nations and the Inter-American Bank for Development. Research projects are concerned with accountability and the ability to measure results, which often require quantitative research. Hence, I argue, a desire by Anglo-American feminist geographers to refrain from using quantitative methods is not an innocent one. It is partially from a cocooning in the academy as opposed to engagement in activism that they have refrained from asking certain questions and have allowed epistemology to take the place of praxis. This has certainly led to an ignorance of the need for certain types of data by women in the South. Feminists who can conduct only qualitative research are limited to asking only certain types of questions, those for which qualitative methods are appropriate; they can ask, for example, about the nature of domestic violence but not about its extent.

Our aim in conducting quantitative research in Red Thread has been to find out more about the nature and extent of domestic violence. Red Thread has used the results of this research not only to help women interviewees who were experiencing domestic violence but also to use the data generated to apply for monies to conduct educational work on eliminating violence against

women and against children. The research experience gained has also led to the Research Team being employed by other agencies. It has also been about what Vicky Lawson calls the 'politics of counting' (Lawson 1995), becoming aware of the ways in which women can become 'data literate' in that they can understand what data sources are available, how data come to be collected and how they are translated into statistics, statistics that often purport to portray aspects of their own social lives, as well as the deficiencies of such data, (as the quotation above from Karen de Souza reveals). Our aim was also to prove to funding agencies that women who often had no schooling beyond primary level could work together to produce reliable and valid data. Indeed it is their very positionality, their already situated knowledge of women's everyday lives in Georgetown that has allowed women in Red Thread to collect such high quality data. Engaging in these research projects has also allowed us to discuss such questions as: why are only certain data collected and why the data are organised into particular categories. Not only do these questions expose the political nature of the process of the production of social statistics about women and also the ways in which quantitative techniques can powerfully reveal lived oppression, they also reveal assumptions about the valuing of women.

The implication for Anglo-American feminist geographers is that there needs to be much greater flexibility over questions of suitable feminist methods; the recognition that no method is inherently feminist and that all data are representations are useful starting points. Finally, for those feminist geographers concerned with the social construction of knowledge there also needs to be a re-emphasizing of the links between activism, social change and research as opposed to a focus primarily on questions of feminist epistemology and the diversionary debate over quantitative versus qualitative research.

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